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Non-verbal complements of modal verbs: the case of directional adverbials in Czech

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with structures where modal verbs in Czech combine, at surface, with an adverbial complement (mostly PP) like in (1). We focus on strict modals *muset* (must), *moci* (can) and *smět* (be allowed), in comparison with the volitional verb *chtít* (want)¹, which allows for the same directional complements, see (2).

- (1) a. Musím do Prahy / k doktorovi. [Czech]
must.1sg to Prague.gen / to doctor.dat²
'I have to go to Prague.' / 'I have to go to the doctor.'
b. Po tom infarktu může jenom na zahradu.
after that heart.attack can.3sg only on garden.acc
'After his heart attack, he can only go out in the garden.'
c. Po tom infarktu nesmí ani na zahradu.
after that heart.attack neg.can.3sg even on garden.acc
'After his heart attack, he is not allowed to even go out in the garden.'
- (2) a. Chceš do kina? [Czech]
want.2sg to movie.gen.
'Do you want to go to the movie?'
b. Chce se ti do kina?
want.3sg.neut. refl you.dat. to movie.gen
'Do you feel like going to the cinema?'

In contrast, this structure is impossible with other lexical verbs that may combine at surface with motion verbs and their directional complements, like *zkusit* 'to try', *akceptovat* 'to accept', *rozhodnout* 'to decide'³:

¹ When relevant, the differences between the strict modals and the verb *want* are explicitly put forward in the paper.

² Abbreviations in glosses: gen = genitive case, dat = dative case, pf = perfective form of the verb (typically by adding a prefix), imf = imperfective form of the verb, fut = future auxiliary,

³ These verbs do not allow for NCA in Czech:

- (i) Zítra zkusím jít do kina. / Zítra *(to) zkusím.
tomorrow try.1sg go to cinema.gen tomorrow it try.1sg
'Tomorrow I'll try to go to the cinema. / Tomorrow I'll try (it).'
(ii) Akceptoval jít dovnitř. / Akceptoval *(to).
accepted go inside accepted it
'He accepted to go inside.' / He accepted (it).

- (3) a. Zítřa zkusím jít do kina. / *Zítřa zkusím do kina. [Czech]
 tomorrow try.1sg go to cinema.gen tomorrow try.1sg to cinema.gen
 ‘Tomorrow I’ll try to go to the cinema.’
 b. Nakonec akceptoval vejít dovnitř. / *Akceptoval dovnitř.
 finally accepted in.go inside accepted inside
 ‘Finally, he accepted to go inside.’

The structures in (1) and (2) raise thus a question with respect to the selectional properties of modal verbs: since modal verbs normally select a VP complement, should we assume that the structures in (1) and (2) contain an elided or a null verb *GO*⁴, or some null copula verb? Or should we better account for these structure by assuming that modal verbs may directly select a directional adverbial, whose motion interpretation supplies a ‘missing’ verb of movement.

Though we are not against the idea of a null verb *GO* in the grammar, we show in this paper that there is not enough evidence to posit such a null lexical verb in structures with strict modal verbs and directional adverbials in Czech. Rather, we argue that these structures are licensed by modality like non-finite or non-sentential interrogatives. However, since matrix sentences require a verbal head to bear tense and agreement feature and to support sentential negation, modal verbs must overtly realize the modality in independent sentences.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we show basic arguments against ellipsis analysis. In section 3, we present arguments for a null verb *GO* that have been put forward by van Riemsdijk for Germanic languages and by Marušič & Žaucer (2005) for Slovenian. We then argue that there is no straightforward evidence for positing a null verb *GO* in Czech. In section 4, we propose an alternative *GO*-less analysis of our structure.

2. Against ellipsis analysis

Modal verbs in Czech allow for ellipsis of their VP-complement, as we can see in (4a). Structures involving ellipsis differ however from structures involving adverbials in at least two aspects. First, elided elements need a linguistic antecedent⁵ in order to be licensed and interpreted, compare (4a) with the underlined VP-antecedent and (4b) without antecedent.

- (4) a. Jan si mohl vzít dovolenou v srpnu, ale jeho kolega nemohl. [Czech]
 Jan refl could take vacation in August but his colleague neg.could
 ‘Jan was allowed to take his vacation in August, but his colleague was not.’
 b. *Janův kolega nemohl.⁶
 Jan.poss colleague neg.could

Second, VP-ellipsis requires one contrastive remnant element. Typically, this contrastive element will be the subject, as in (4), but it can also be the complement of the non-finite lexical verb, that had been topicalized and moved out of the VP before ellipsis took place, as shown in (5). In the same way, the contrast may involve adverbial elements, like in (6). Note that in

⁴ *GO* means an abstract verb that can be lexicalized by *jít* (go) or *jet* (ride) or their imperfective or perfective variants.

⁵ Exophoric antecedent of VP-ellipsis are limited to conventional cases (Gruet-Skrabalova 2016), and even in such cases, we can assume they contain a null verbal anaphor rather than an elided VP. This verbal anaphor gets its interpretation from the situation that is going on:

Ja už nemůžu. [Czech]

I yet neg.can.1sg

‘I cannot more do what I am doing.’

⁶ Example (a’) and (b’) are unacceptable without a previous context.

absence of the VP antecedent, the sequence ‘modal verb + locative adverbial’ in (6b) is ungrammatical.

- (5) a. Latinu můžu učít já a řečtinu může můj kolega. [Czech]
 Latin.acc can.1sg teach I and Greek.acc can.3sg my colleague
 ‘I can teach Latin and my colleague can teach Greek.’
 b. *Řečtinu může můj kolega.
 Greek.acc can.3sg my colleague
- (6) a. Doma si hrát můžete ale venku nesmíte. [Czech]
 home.loc refl play can.2pl but outside.loc neg.can.2pl
 ‘You can play at home, but you are not allowed to play outside.’
 b. *Venku nesmíte.
 outside.loc neg.can.2pl

Importantly, no antecedent is necessary to license and interpret the sentences in (1) and (2)⁷ above. Likewise, the directional PP is not necessarily contrastively focused with another PP in the context. We conclude thus that ellipsis of a lexical verb of movement can be thus be easily rejected. In the next section, we turn to another analysis that considers that the structures we are dealing with contain a null verb *GO*.

3. Arguments in favor of a null verb *GO*

Structures like in (1) exist in other languages. Van Riemsdijk (2002) argues for a null verb *GO* in Germanic languages (except for English) like in Swiss German in (7a). His main argument comes from the contrast between (7a) and (7b) with respect to the position of the adverbial element *häi* (home). When a lexical verb of motion is present in the sentence, the adverbial cannot occur in clause-final position, see (7b). The fact the adverbial in (4a) is acceptable in clause-final surface position suggests that it is followed by a null verb *GO*. Since Czech is not a V2 language, this argument cannot be applied to our data.

- (7) a. ...wil mer (häi) hettet (häi) söle (häi).
 ... because we home would home had-to home ‘
 ... because we should've gone home.’
 b. ... wil si iri tochter (häi) hettet (häi) söle (häi) schicke (*häi).
 ... because they their daughter home would home had-to home send home
 ‘... because they should've sent their daughter home.’

Marušič & Žaucer (2005) argue for the existence of a null verb *GO* in Slovenian, whose distribution would be however larger than that of a null *GO* in Germanic. In the next subsections, we discuss the main arguments they present in favor of their claim: the presence of contradictory temporal adverbials, the use of purpose PPs, covert modality and VP conjunction. We argue that these arguments are not really conclusive, at least for Czech.

⁷ Gruet-Skrabalova (2019) also shows that even epistemic modal verbs allow for ellipsis:

Může to být pravda, ale nemusí.
 can it be true but neg.must
 ‘It can be true, but it doesn’t have to.’

In contrast, modal verbs combining with directional adverbials have always deontic reading, see section 3.1.

3.1 Temporal adverbials

Marušič & Žaucer (2005) argue that the possibility to have two contradictory temporal adverbs in (8b), but not in (8a), indicates that the sentence (8b) contains two temporally independent events and thus a syntactic structure with two VPs. The second adverb in (8b) would thus be dependent of the VP involving the null verb *GO*.

- (8) a. *Včeraj Lina ni šla jutri domov. [Slovenian]
 yesterday Lina not go.PAST tomorrow home
 ‘Yesterday, Lina didn’t/doesn’t/won’t go home tomorrow.’
 b. Včeraj se Lini ni ljubilo jutri domov.
 yesterday NON-ACTIVE Lina.dat not feel-like.PAST tomorrow home
 ‘Yesterday, Lina didn’t feel like going home tomorrow.’

In Czech, the simultaneous presence of ‘yesterday’ and ‘today’ in (9) is infelicitous even when the modal verb is followed by the overt verb *jít* ‘go’. Note however that the verb in (9a) has deontic reading (*i.e.* he had to go to the doctor at a moment *x*). The example (10a), where the modal verb has epistemic reading (*i.e.* he thought it necessary (yesterday) to go to the doctor (today)) is acceptable. It is thus the obligation of ‘going somewhere’ that cannot be situated at another moment than the event of ‘going somewhere’ itself. The fact that the verb ‘go’ cannot be omitted in both (9b) and (10b) implies that the structures where modals combine with a directional PP only have deontic reading. This is actually the case in (1) and (2) above.

- (9) a. *Včera musel jít k doktorovi dneska. [Czech]
 yesterday must.ps.3sg.m go to doctor.dat today
 (intended meaning: ‘Yesterday he had to go to the doctor today.’)
 b. *Včera musel k doktorovi dneska.
 yesterday must.ps.3sg.m go to doctor.dat today
- (10) a. Včera musel jít k doktorovi už dneska [Czech]
 yesterday must.ps.3sg.m go to doctor.dat already today
 (a dneska říká, že už ho to nebolí).
 and today say.3sg that already he.acc it neg.ache.3sg
 ‘Yesterday it was necessary for him to go to the doctor already today, and today he says his arm no longer hurts him.’
 b. *Včera musel k doktorovi už dneska.
 yesterday must.ps.3sg.m to doctor.dat already today

In contrast, with the volitional verb *chtít* (want), the contradictory temporal adverbials are acceptable both with and without the overt verb:⁸

- (11) a. Včera chtěl odjet na dovolenou už příští týden, [Czech]
 yesterday wanted pf.go on holidays already next week,
 a dneska chce odjet až za dva týdny!
 and today wants go only in two weeks

⁸ This is also true for the verb *chtít* when it is used in neuter form with a dative subject, meaning ‘feel like’:
 Včera se mu zachtělo (jít) domů už dneska.
 yesterday refl he.dat pf.wanted.neut go home already today
 ‘Yesterday he felt like going home today.’

‘Yesterday, he wanted to leave on holiday already next week, and today he wants to leave only in two weeks!’

- b. Včera chtěl na dovolenou už příští týden, a dneska chce až za dva týdny.
yesterday wanted on holidays already next week, and today wants only in two weeks (= 11a)

Since the structures with strict modal verbs and directional adverbials only involve one event, we conclude that they do not require the presence of a null verb *GO*. Even if we admit that a single node T could be compatible with two V nodes⁹, we consider that the data like in (9) and (10) do not establish a strong piece of evidence in favor of a null V head.

3.2 Purpose PPs

A modal verb in Slovenian can combine not only with a directional PP, like in (12a), but also with a non-directional PP with the ‘purpose’ preposition *po*, like in (12b), which implies ‘movement with a purpose’. Since *po* cannot occur with other than motion verbs, Marušič & Žaucer (2005) claim that in (12b), which is read as ‘he must go and get bread’, a motion verb must actually present but is not pronounced.

- (12) a. Vsak Slovenec mora vsaj enkrat na Triglav. [Slovenian]
every Slovenian must at-least once onto Triglav
‘Every Slovenian must go up Mt. Triglav at least once.’
b. Peter mora (v trgovino) po kruh.
Peter must to store for bread
‘Peter must go (to the store) and get some bread.’

In Czech, the PP after the modal verb can also be introduced by the purpose preposition *pro* (for) or *na* (on/for), as shown in (13). Such a purpose PP is not by itself directional but it implies a place where we have to go in order to get the DP introduced by *pro* or *na*. This place can be stated explicitly by a directional PP, as shown in (14). But usually, the directional PP is not necessary, because it can be inferred from the purpose PP itself: the croissants are bought in a store, the mushrooms grow in the forest, and the children have to be picked up from school.

- (13) a. Zeptej se ho jestli může pro pár rohlíků. [Czech]
ask refl he.acc if can.3sg for some croissants.gen
‘Ask him if he can go and get some croissants.’
b. Už jsou čtyři, musím pro Adama.
already are four must.1sg for Adam.acc
‘It’s 4 o’clock, I have to go and pick up Adam.’
c. Dneska odpoledne můžem třeba na houby.
today afternoon can.1pl maybe on mushrooms.acc
‘This afternoon we may go and look for mushrooms.’
- (14) a. Zeptej se ho jestli může do obchodu pro pár rohlíků. [Czech]
ask refl he.acc if can.3sg to store.gen for some croissants.gen
‘Ask him if he can go to the store and get some croissants.’

⁹ This has been noted us by an anonymous reviewer. I am thankful to this reviewer for his/her constructive remarks.

- b. Už jsou čtyři, musím do školky pro Adama.
 already are four must.1sg to kindergarten.gen for Adam.acc
 ‘It’s 4 o’clock, I have to go and pick up Adam from kindergarten.’
- c. Dneska odpoledne můžem třeba do lesa na houby.
 today afternoon can.1pl maybe to forest.gen on mushrooms.acc
 ‘This afternoon we may go to the forest and look for mushrooms.’

We claim thus that a purpose PP do not thus require an overt verb of movement. Rather, we consider that an event of movement implies both direction and goal (see section 4 for more details), which has as consequence that purpose PPs appear in the same modal structures that directional PPs. We conclude that the data discussed here do not necessarily imply the presence of a null verb *GO* in structures where modal verbs combine with a purpose PP.

3.3 Coordination

In Slovenian, modal verbs can have scope over conjunction. Assuming that conjuncts must be identical, Marušič & Žaucer (2005) claim that both conjunct in examples like (15) must be (at least) VPs.

- (15) Vid ni mogel več niti do avta niti postaviti šotora. [Slovenian]
 Vid not could still neither to car neither put-up tent
 ‘Vid could neither go to the car nor put up a tent.’

However, that there has been shown in the literature (e. g. Bayer 1996) that categorial identity of conjuncts is not obligatory. The conjuncts need to be semantically compatible and able to appear alone in the position of the coordinate phrase, as we can see in (16). It is thus not surprising that we can conjoin directional adverbials after modals with an overt VP, as in (17), since both may function as a predicative phrase. These examples can simply be analyzed as involving two conjoined PredPs.

- (16) a. Doktor mu doporučuje víc klidu a nekouřit. [Czech]
 doctor. he.dat recommend.3s more rest.gen and neg.smoke
 ‘The doctor recommends that he rests more and stops smoking.’
 b. Doktor mu doporučuje víc klidu / nekouřit.
 ‘The doctor recommends that he rests more / that he stops smoking.’
- (17) a. Dneska odpoledne můžem třeba do lesa a zaplavat si. [Czech]
 today afternoon can.1pl maybe to forest.gen and pf.swim refl
 ‘This afternoon we may have a walk to the forest and go swimming.’
 b. Řekl jsem, že musíš na nákup a dodělat úkoly.¹⁰
 said aux.1sg that must.2sg on shopping.acc and pf.finish homework.acc
 ‘I said that you have to go shopping and finish your homework.’

We thus conclude that the conjoined structures in (17) do not necessarily imply the presence of two VPs, and therefore that of a null verb *GO* in the conjunct containing the directional PP.

3.4 Covert modality

Finally, Marušič & Žaucer (2005) show for Slovenian that infinitival wh-clauses, that get some sort of modal interpretation (cf. Bhaat 2000), can also occur with no overt verb and a directional

¹⁰ The reverse order is also possible (*Řekl jsem, že musíš dodělat úkoly a na nákup*), but it is more natural to put the longest conjunct after the conjunction.

or purpose PP. Assuming that a clause should not exist without a verb, Marušič & Žaucer (2005) claim again that we have to postulate a null verb *GO* to explain such examples:

- (18) a. Tinčku so pokazali [kako do štacjona]. [Slovenian]
 Tinček-DAT AUX-3P.PL.PAST showed-PL how to train-station
 ‘They showed Tinček [how to go to the train station].’
 b. Še zdaj ne ve [kako z biciklom po vino].
 still now not knows how with bike for wine
 ‘He still doesn't know how to go and get wine with his bike.’

In Czech, both directional and purpose PPs like *na nádraží* (‘to station’) and *pro chleba* (‘for bread’) respectively may also appear in embedded interrogative clauses without an overt motion verb:

- (19) a. Zeptej se ho, kudy na nádraží. [Czech]
 ask refl he.dat which.way to station
 ‘Ask him how to get to the station.’
 b. Nevím, jak v tom sněhu pro chleba.
 neg.know.1sh how in this snow for bread
 ‘I don’t know how to go and get some bread in this snow.’

Moreover, these PPs may also appear in independent non-sentential interrogative fragments like in (20). In contrast, these contexts do not license static PPs that require the presence of the copula *být* (‘be’) both in embedded wh-clause in (21a) and in independent non-sentential interrogative fragments in (21b).

- (20) a. Kudy na nádraží? [Czech]
 which.way to station
 ‘Which way should we take to go to the station?’
 b. Kam pro chleba?
 where for bread
 ‘Where should we go to get some bread?’
- (21) a. Zeptej se ho, kde je nádraží / *kde nádraží. [Czech]
 ask refl he.dat where is station where station
 ‘Ask him where the station is.’
 b. *Kde nádraží? / Kde je nádraží?
 where station where is station
 ‘Where is the station?’

In contrast, directional PPs are not able to function as predicates in contexts without modality (and without tense and agreement, see section 4) even if we could postulate a null *GO*:¹¹

- (22) Já jdu na nádraží. / *Já na nádraží.
 I go.1sg to station. I to station
 ‘I am going to the station.’

¹¹ Cf. MacShane (2000) who shows that this is also true for Polish, but not for Russian.

Assuming thus that *wh*-contexts contain some covert modality, we can suppose that this is precisely this covert modality that licenses directional and by extension purpose PP (but not the static PPs), and not a motion verb, would it be overt or null. We thus conclude this that these contexts do not necessarily require the presence of a null verb *GO*.

3.5 Summary

In this section, we presented the main arguments Marušič & Žaucer (2005) give in favor of a null verb *GO* in structures with directional adverbials. However, we do not think them very convincing at least for Czech. The impossibility to have two contradictory temporal adverbials implies that the structures under discussion involve only one event, which does not require the presence of a null V of movement. The fact that purpose PPs behave like directional PPs is not surprising because the purpose PPs imply a place where we have to go in order to get something. The data only show that directional and purpose PPs may occur in verbless contexts provided these contexts are in some way modal. Finally, the coordination of a PP and a VP after the modal verbs does not imply VP-conjunction either, because coordination does not require strict categorial identity. VP and directional PP can be conjoined because they are semantically predicative phrases. In the next section, we propose another line of reasoning that allows for a *GO*-less analysis of the structures we deal with.

4. For a *GO*-less analysis

We have seen above that directional and purpose PPs may appear in *wh*-contexts, which contain some sort of covert modality. The same observation can be made for exclamative contexts, which are also associated with modality (cf. Le Querler 1996). As shown in (23), exclamatives allow for directional but not for static PPs:

- (23) a. Domů! / Do postele!
 home.dir in bed.gen
 ‘Go home’ / ‘Go in bed’
 b. *Doma! / *V posteli!
 home.loc in bed.loc

We will henceforth assume that PPs with motion and purpose¹² interpretation can be licensed by modality. The question arises how these PPs can be licensed in declarative clauses which are not by themselves modal and require an overt verbal element to bear agreement and tense features¹³. This is the reason why we have to use the copula *být* ‘be’ with nominal, adjectival or adverbial predicates; the copula ‘be’ however licenses only adverbials with non-motion interpretation, *i.e.* static PPs or source PPs like in (24).

- (24) Jsem v lese. / Jsem z vesnice. / *Jsem do vesnice. [Czech]
 am in forest.loc am from village.gen. am to village.gen
 ‘I am in the forest.’ / ‘I am from a village.’ / *‘I am to a village.’

We claim that the PPs under discussion can be inserted into the syntactic structure in two ways. They can first be selected by lexical verbs of movement which do not by themselves express the direction nor the goal of the movement. The motion verbs in Germanic and Slavic languages actually express the manner but not the direction (cf. Talmy 1991), see the verbs in (25). The

¹² Within a game e.g., shouting *Na ně!* ‘for them’ means ‘Let’s run on the enemy!’.

¹³ Syntactically declarative clauses can be used as assertions or as yes-no questions.

directional or goal PPs function thus as part of a complex predicate whose meaning is ‘to move in some manner *x* to some place *y* in order to get *z*’.

- (25) jít / jet / běžet / letět / hopkat do lesa pro maliny [Czech]
 walk ride run fly skip to forest for raspberries

The predicate of movement contains thus three variables: *x*, *y* and *z*. The variables *y* and *z* can be easily left unexpressed because leaving out the place or the goal variable allows still to obtain a clause with a verbal predicate. In contrast, if we leave out the manner variable, which is expressed on the lexical verb itself, we end up with a verbless predicate, and the sentence will be ruled out by the grammar. We propose however that we may insert these PPs into syntax without a verb of movement, *i.e.* as predicates, provided that they are supported by some verbal element. Since directional/goal PPs can be semantically licensed by modality, the verbal element required as a support for these PPs would be a modal verb. The modal verb would thus function as a verbal support whose role is to establish the predicative relation between the subject and the non-verbal predicate, to bear tense and agreement features, and to bear negative prefix *ne-* expressing sentential negation. This proposal implies that modal verbs always combine with a predicative phrase, which could be verbal or non-verbal, the latter one being limited to directional and goal PPs, see (26)¹⁴. The verbal predicate would not be limited to the verbs of movement.

- (26) a. [TP ... [AgrP ... [NegP [ModP ... [PredP ...]]]]]
 b. [TP *nemusím* [AgrP *ne-t_{mod}* [NegP *ne-t_{mod}* [ModP *t_{mod}* [PredP [PP *pro Adama*]]]]]]]
 neg.must.1sg for Adam

The possibility for a modal verb to combine either with a verbal predicate denoting a movement event or with a directional/goal PP predicate implying a movement event leads to two different surface structures that seem semantically equivalent, see (27). However, the manner variable, which is explicitly expressed on the verb of movement, is missing in structures with directional/goal PP predicates; it can only be inferred from the subject or the situation to which the adverbial predicate applies.

- (27) a. Už jsou čtyři, musím *(do)jít / (do)jet / běžet* pro Adama. [Czech]
 already are four must.1sg pf.go pf.drive run for Adam.acc
 ‘It’s 4 o’clock, I have to go and pick up Adam (from kindergarten).’
 b. Už jsou čtyři, musím pro Adama.
 already are four must.1sg for Adam.acc
 ‘It’s 4 o’clock, I have to go and pick up Adam (from kindergarten).’

Thus, in (27a), the structure containing an overt verb of movement denotes a movement event in which a human subject has to go in some manner to the place where Adam actually is in order to achieve the goal of picking him up from that place. The manner is explicitly given by the verb: to walk, to drive, to run. In (27b), the structure containing only the goal PP implies that there is a movement event in which a human subject has as goal to pick up Adam from the place where Adam actually is. The hearer can however infer the manner of achieving this goal from the situation or from his informational background (e.g. usual situation).

¹⁴ See Hansen (2000) and Gruet-Skrabalova (2019) for other types of non-verbal complements of modal verbs.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that structures where strict modal verbs combine at surface with an adverbial complement do not require to postulate the presence of a null verb *GO*. We have shown that these structures refer to a single semantic event, denoted by a single predicate, which can contain verbal or non-verbal material. We have also shown that covert modality licenses directional and goal PPs in *wh*-clauses, non-sentential *wh*-fragments and exclamative clauses. We have therefore argued that modality may license such PPs also in declarative sentences provided that there is an overt verbal element able to bear functional features. In our proposal, we have put forward that directional and goal PPs refer to place and goal variables that are parts of a movement event. We have proposed that these PPs can be inserted into the syntactic structure either as complements of a lexical verb of movement, or as non-verbal predicates. The latter insertion requires that two conditions be met within the declarative clause: presence of modality and presence of a verbal head. These two conditions are successfully met in sentences with modal verbs. Modal verbs are functional heads that express semantic modality and that are able to bear tense and agreement features, and also to support the negative prefix *ne-* expressing sentential negation. The adverbial predicate in these structures implies a movement event, whose manner variable can be inferred from the subject, the situation or the hearer's knowledge.

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